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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PSOE PRESIDENT MANUEL CHAVES

Classified By: Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Ambassador met on October 6 with Manuel Chaves, national President of the governing Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), as well as President of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. Their discussion touched on US-Spain relations, initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa, the controversy over the proposed Catalan regional statute, and the Odyssey Marine Exploration case. Chaves underscored the importance of Turkey's entry into the European Union for the success of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, as well as on the best outcome for the Catalan statute. End summary.

US-Spain Bilateral Relations

12. (SBU) The Ambassador described the excellent reception he had received during his first three months in Spain, and said he had arrived at the perfect moment, when both President Bush and the GOS were ready to get the bilateral relationship back on track. Chaves said that the US and Spain's disagreement on Iraq and Spain's troop withdrawal in 2004 were just one episode in a relationship that had always been strong in the past. He pointed out that the American presence at the Spanish bases in Rota and Moron (both located in Andalusia) had always been positive for Spain. He said that he, like the Ambassador, was optimistic about the future of the relationship.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador thanked Chaves for his long-time support in Rota and Moron. He said the military relationship between the two countries had continued to be strong in the past couple of years, and the US was pleased with Spanish assistance in Afghanistan, where they command a Provincial Reconstruction Team and co-lead a Forward Support Base, and in Iraq, since the Spanish are to begin bringing Iraqi security forces to Spain for training.

Muslim Outreach and the Middle East

14. (U) The Ambassador spoke of Andalusia's rich cultural heritage as a land where Christians, Muslims and Jews had lived together in the past. He described the Embassy and USG efforts to support religious tolerance and reach out in particular to Muslims, stressing the USG's conviction that terrorism is not representative of Islam. He said he was pleased to be speaking later that evening about tolerance and diversity at the Fundacion Tres Culturas, an organization co-sponsored by the governments of Morocco and Andalusia and dedicated to promoting cultural understanding. He said he looked forward to future collaborations of this type in the future.

15. (C) Chaves acknowledged the good work of Tres Culturas, and brought up the Spanish-proposed Alliance of Civilizations initiative. He said the Spanish government believed the Alliance was an extremely important project, and was determined that the UN High-Level Group (HLG) not be simply a talk shop, but come up with concrete proposals. Significantly, he added that he had "told the President (Zapatero) that the Alliance of Civilizations will be useless if Turkey is not brought into the European Union."

16. (U) The Ambassador replied that the US hoped to support the Alliance, and was pleased that Spain was to contribute to the G-8's Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

Catalonia

17. (U) Discussion turned to the Catalan regional statute, which the Ambassador said he had been following with interest. He asked Chaves for his insights as to what this issue means for Spain. Chaves first described the current state of affairs: the draft statute, which has been passed by the Catalan regional parliament, and which many politicians in the rest of Spain claim is unconstitutional, is now with the National Congress, where amendments can be proposed. He said that if the various national and Catalan regional parties could reach an agreement on changes to the draft,

Congress could pass the revised statute and send it back to Catalonia for another vote in the regional parliament. The Catalan Region would then organize a referendum to give the Catalans the opportunity to accept or reject the final text. If the national parties cannot come to agreement on revisions, Congress would have to reject the statute outright, a result Chaves described as the "worst possible outcome."

18. (SBU) Chaves said he thought it was crucial that the parties negotiate a solution acceptable for all sides in the National Congress, otherwise the Catalans would blame Madrid once again for thwarting its ambitions, and it would breed resentment in the region, as well as in the rest of Spain. (Comment: This would clearly be a bad outcome for Zapatero's PSOE government as well.)

Odyssey

19. (U) The Ambassador also brought up the ongoing case of the American company Odyssey Marine Exploration and its outstanding request to explore the shipwreck of the HMS Sussex off the coast of Spain. Chaves said he was familiar with the case, though he was not up to date on where it currently stands. He promised to do some research and get back to the Embassy on the issue.

Comment

10. (C) As President of the PSOE, and given his long experience in the party, Chaves's opinions carry significant weight in the national government. A well-read man with extensive knowledge of and interest in the United States, Chaves remains an important interlocutor for the Embassy on issues of US national interest.
AGUIRRE